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ANARCHISM AND THE NAPOLEONIC REVIVAL.

BY KARL BLIND.

AMONG the more far-seeing French Republicans a great deal of apprehension has recently arisen through the almost simultaneous appearance of the epidemic disease of anarchism and the revival of the Napoleonic cult. Widely apart as the two movements seem to be in spirit and aim, the one yet serves and unwittingly furthers the other.

As a nation, the French have unfortunately a leaning towards the glorious government of a strong man, especially since the Huguenot element was rooted out from them by sanguinary persecution, and since Paris has nearly sucked all strength from the municipal and provincial life of the country. The old Gallic, or rather Kelt-Iberian, spirit, though occasionally very turbulent, is eminently favorable to the one-man system. The Teutonic or Frankish infusion, which, in Montesquieu's words, brought the principles of self-government "from the forests of Germany," has in course of time become more and more obliterated in France. The result has often been a deplorable one. Noble risings, begun in the name of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have repeatedly collapsed and slid into Cæsarism. By a violent rebound the arbitrary rule of a usurping Emperor had to be overthrown by a combination of foreign invasion and of a revolutionary upheaval. So it was again in 1870. Yet it is a fact of very serious import that, within the short space of time which has elapsed since then, the Republic was thrice menaced in its existence: First, by a planned military state-stroke (happily revealed in time) of Marshal MacMahon; secondly, by the overweening ambition of Gambetta, in whom the vein of Cæsaristic demagogism was strongly developed, and whose premature death has probably saved France from a great peril; thirdly, by General Boulanger.

Add to this that, since the days of the first great revolution down to those of Louis Philippe and Napoleon III., the democracy of France has shown itself deeply tainted with the hankering after *gloire* and conquest. The natural consequence is that in times of commotion "a sword"—*un sabre*—or a name representing traditions of that kind has always a remarkable chance there. That chance is easily strengthened through an unfavorable feature of the French middle class; namely, its political timidity and want of backbone. Now, taking into account the widespread alarm created by a series of Anarchistic outrages, such national characteristics make for a vague desire to see a commanding personality—a "Saviour of Society"—at the head of affairs.

All this, combined with the hankering after revenge for the defeats of 1870-71, and with the shaking given to the authority of the ruling Republican party through the Panama scandal, in which so many of its prominent men were involved, is apt to confer a peculiar significance upon the recent extraordinary revival of the Bonapartean legend. It is true, no impressive pretender of that name is just now in the field. But remembering how narrowly France escaped, a few years ago, from the designs of General Boulanger—who fortunately proved weak enough to be restrained by female hands, even as Gambetta found his death through a wound received in a love intrigue, it cannot be denied that a danger undoubtedly lurks in the present situation. The danger has been enhanced by the sedulous cultivation of the Russian alliance. Republican sentiments and principles were flung to the winds for the sake of lauding the Czar to the skies. The "Three Presidents," that is, the chief magistrate of the Republic and the heads of the two Houses of Parliament, vied with each other in fulsome eulogies. M. Challemel-Lacour forgot himself so far as to declare, in the name of the Senate, the "homage of France" to the Northern Autocrat. It was an expression not fit to be used by the Speaker of any parliamentary body, let alone a Republican one; for "homage," in a political sense, means the submission of a liege to his sovereign.

Is it to be wondered at, in presence of such manifestations in honor of the archetype of despotism, that the civic and democratic spirit should have become weakened, and that, with the extension of the horrors of Anarchism, a sneaking admiration of

Imperialist Napoleonic splendor should have been fostered anew among a people whose constitutions have, within a century, so often changed with kaleidoscopic rapidity? Pretenders of the Cæsarist kind have always, at least, two strings to their bow: whilst aiming at irresponsible power and cultivating the army, they try to ingratiate themselves with the masses by a pretended care for their material interests as against the middle and upper classes. So did Louis Napoleon during his days of proscription and of imprisonment at the fortress of Ham.

“To Louis Blanc, as a token of esteem and friendship on the part of the author:” These were the words which the captive Pretender wrote on the title-page of his treatise on *The Extinction of Pauperism*, handing it to his visitor, who some years afterwards became a member of the Provisional Government of 1848, and who is famed both as a Socialistic writer and as the historian of the “Ten Years” of Louis Philippe’s rule, and of the great revolution. With bitter feelings Louis Blanc showed this to me while in exile, in London. The Bonaparteian Pretender went even further. Before starting from London for Paris in 1848, he once more sought an interview with Louis Blanc, who had then already been compelled to seek safety on English soil. And on arriving at the French capital his first idea was, to come into contact with Proudhon, the father of the doctrine of Anarchism, or No-Government!

Proudhon’s name and reckless agitation had then become a terror to the French *bourgeoisie*. For that very reason the would-be usurper, who in those days still draped himself in the mantle of democratic phraseology, thought he could make advantageous use of Proudhon for frightening the middle class into submission to a dictatorial government. Nor were the hopes of Louis Bonaparte deceived as to Proudhon’s activity. Though disagreeing with the Prince President of the Republic for a time, and thereby incurring imprisonment in 1849, Proudhon, from his very prison, wrote articles damaging the Republican cause. Later on, after the criminal deed of 1851, he even went to the length of issuing a work entitled *The Social Revolution, demonstrated by the Coup d’Etat of December 2*. In it, Proudhon glorified that Napoleonic usurpation. For the sake of utterly misleading his own anarchistic followers, he wound up with the assertion that “the last word of socialism is the no-government system!”

In this way, anarchism in France has helped on the cause of a despotism than which there has been nothing viler since the days of the worst Roman Emperors—a despotism under which the country groaned for wellnigh twenty years.

The careful student of contemporary history, who has the personal experience of the last forty-five years before him, cannot but fear that public opinion in France once more exhibits signs of a very unsound growth, and which it would be well for the true friends of the Republican form of government to watch closely. When I look back to the days of Spring, 1848, I vividly recollect from what small germs Napoleonism then sprouted up, with astonishing swiftness, into a upas-tree of oppression. We lived then for a short time in Alsace as exiles from a defeated Republican rising in Germany. I recollect a small print, called *Le Petit Napoléon*, published then at Strasburg in the interest of the Pretender, who resided in London. It was not without reason that he started this journalistic propaganda in the fortified town where, in 1836, he had endeavored to effect a military rising against the Orleans monarchy.

In 1849, when our democratic movement had become victorious in southwestern Germany, and I was at Paris as a member of an embassy, I had many a lively discussion with leading French Republicans as to the character and the aims of the man who had in the mean while become the President of the Republic. To my surprise, they were all imbued with a strange optimism, so far as any danger from a state-stroke was concerned. They wholly underestimated the capability of Louis Bonaparte and his gang. As to the possibility of the success of a *coup d'état*, their remark generally was: "Oh, if ever he dared to do this, his attempt would collapse amidst universal laughter!"

Strange to say, I have found the same optimism amongst French friends of various shades of the Republican party, even among such as had suffered exile or imprisonment in consequence of the deed of December 2, 1851, when, during General Boulanger's earlier career, I entered into correspondence with them, sounding a strong note of warning both in the letters addressed to them and by public writings. It is true, afterwards, when the crisis came and the dark plot was laid bare, the same friends expressed their regret, verbally or in letters I have before me, at having thus misconceived the seriousness of the situation.

Out of curiously small beginnings the present revival of the Napoleonic cult has also come up—even as was the case in 1848. At this moment, the stage, literature, the salons, the fashions, and the industrial art of France are full of the Bonapartean tradition. Everywhere the stamp of the Empire is to be met, and the heroic figure of the Corsican conqueror and tyrant forms the central attraction. It is as if Lanfrey, Jules Barni, Taine, and others had written in vain. Yet who could believe that this resurrection of a legend which, after 1870, seemed to be as dead as Julius Cæsar, actually had its origin in the “Black Cat” coffee-house, that resort of a somewhat Bohemian class of artists? It was here that the new enthusiasm for the apparently extinct Napoleonic cult was born, through the theatrical performance of Caran d’Ache’s *L’Epopée*, a series of silhouette tableaux, attractive for the crowd, without any dramatic centre, yet apt to allure the motley crew of gaping on-lookers. Wonderful to say, there soon came, as the report of this show spread, a perfect pilgrimage of people of all classes on a visit to the *Café au Chat Noir*. A Paris correspondent gives the following description :

The first tableau represented the bivouac, where the soldiers were cooking their soup. Suddenly a rolling of thunder, lightning flashes, and a change of scene. The tent of the Emperor appears. The “little man in grey,” followed by his spaniel, goes his round, whilst the Grenadier Guard present arms. This idyll ends with the moment of his return. An adjutant arrives and goes to the door of the tent. “Is it thou, Josephine?” Napoleon asks from within. “It is the enemy!” the adjutant reports. “All the better!” is the quiet answer of the Emperor, and forthwith he holds a review of his troops.

Then follows one tableau of a battle upon the other. The sun of Austerlitz is seen, and the Emperor on horseback, surrounded by his staff. The orderlies take his commands; the troops manœuvre in the midst of the smoke of powder; the hussars of the guard charge; the artillery thunders away. The battlefield is covered with corpses. The retreat from Russia casts a dark shadow into this series of pictures, but presently more expanded scenes appear. The Place de la Concorde is filled with a vast multitude eagerly waiting—*le public idolâtre*—the devoutly worshipping public, as the explanation says. Then the *défile* begins. Regiment follows regiment. M. Caran d’Ache had drawn about four thousand figures. Comic intermezzos interrupt the more grandiose and ceremonial parts. The banners of the enemy, captured in battle, are triumphantly shown. Princes, made prisoners, go by in fetters (!) ; and, at last, Napoleon himself in his gilded coronation carriage. The whole finishes with a resplendent apotheosis, the public crying “*Vive l’Empereur !*”

This rather ridiculous and partly anachronistic play drew im-

mensely. Wealthy people eagerly asked M. Caran d'Ache to be allowed to have the show in their drawing-rooms at evening parties, arranged by the hostess for purposes of benevolence, the guests readily paying a hundred francs for a seat. The somewhat infantine trait which occasionally characterizes Parisians in spite of the otherwise rather different aspect and parfum of society in that gay capital, came out very curiously during the rage for the silhouette pictures of the *Café au Chat Noir*.

As an inevitable sequence, the scene of this sudden resurrection of the Bonapartean cult was laid, last Christmas, in the nurseries of France. *The Great Napoleon for the Little Children*, by J. de Marthold & Job, was published with the date of the present year. In that book the *epopée* commences with the young Bonaparte riding a hobby-horse with a lion's head, until at last he rises to heaven surrounded by a halo of light. The Napoleon drawn by Job's pencil for the little ones is certainly, before all, the great conqueror, the victor of the Pyramids, of Marengo and Austerlitz. At the same time he is the loving father, who takes pleasure in driving a goat-drawn carriage with his son, the King of Rome. He offers his snuffbox to his grenadiers. When his old soldiers have taught their dogs even to salute the Emperor, he on his part salutes also these Bonapartist hounds.

The first attempt at the "Black Cat" Coffee-House was followed by M. Martin-Laya's *Napoleon: a National Epopée in three parts, with six acts and fifty Tableaux*. It was given at the Theatre of the Porte Saint Martin, and it has had an immense success, although this spectacular piece, too, only appeals to the instincts of a crowd assembled at a fair. The whole life of Napoleon is represented in that piece down to the inhumation of his body in the Dome of the Invalides. The personages appearing on the stage only speak a few words, after which, in each case, the curtain comes down, and a new scenery delights the eye of the great and little children. Between the acts a magic lantern does its work by casting pictures on a white curtain.

When Waterloo is shown, the Old Guard is, of course, to the fore under Cambronne, to whom, until lately, the famous so-called historical utterance has been attributed, "*La Garde meurt, mais elle ne se rend pas!*" (The Guard dies, but it does not surrender.) Cambronne never uttered that saying. Victor

Hugo, in *Les Misérables*, has restored the true text. It is composed of a single word, a monosyllable, which is unfit for printing on account of its downright nastiness. This word, not unfrequently in the mouth of a French trooper, is as far removed as possible from the sublime and pathetic, and few will share the enthusiasm which Victor Hugo, in a fit of strange taste, expresses for it. At Paris, the really historical, though abominable, exclamation is now thundered forth by Cambronne in M. Martin Laya's play, and the audience invariably breaks forth into patriotic ecstasy.

As a matter of fact, I may mention here that General Cambronne not only did not utter the grandiloquent saying usually attributed to him, but that he was also very far from dying rather than to surrender. He had the misfortune to be made a prisoner at Waterloo by a Hanoverian officer and was led over the battlefield in a somewhat undignified manner by his shoulder straps. He lived for years afterwards, and even served under the Restoration; but the legend about what he was alleged to have said, and acted upon at Waterloo, lived with him, and indeed for a great many years afterwards.

These theatrical performances at Paris were succeeded by the publication of Marbot's *Memoirs*, referring to the First Empire; by M. Arthur Lévy's *Napoléon Intime*; by Masson's *Napoléon et les Femmes*; by Sardou's *Mademoiselle Sans Gêne*; by a cheap *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*; sold on the boulevards for a sou, and by quite a series of novellistic *feuilletons* in various papers. It is as if a new political saint had all at once been discovered, and as if every one holding a pen or a brush were in hot haste to profit from his astounding popularity.

In *Napoléon Intime* the figure of the tyrannic conqueror is curiously altered into that of a good-natured citizen, with all the virtues and manners of a well-to-do middle-class man. He is an excellent husband, never failing in his careful regard for his two successive spouses, and never creating any scandal by unlawful connections. On the other hand, Masson's book forms an exact contrast in the Decameron style; so that these various publications offer food for all kinds of taste.

Both these latter books scarcely remind one of the real character of Napoleon, who at the Beresina, when seeing the struggling mass of his own soldiers that had fallen from the bridge into the river, sardonically exclaimed, "*Voyez les crapauds*," and who

one day said to Prince Metternich: "You are not a soldier, and you do not know what moves a soldier's soul. A man of my kind laughs at the loss of the lives of millions of men."

The performances at the "Chat Noir" café came into vogue at the time when General Boulanger still rode on his black Tunisian charger, followed by Arab horsemen in their picturesque costume, and when revolutionary Paris even had become almost mad with enthusiasm for that theatrical upstart. In those days, Boulanger was once saluted by the publican Salis as "the coming Emperor," amidst the applause of a *turba mobilis* of the most shady character, but which yet professed to be the exponent of real Democracy.

Here I may mention that a friend of Gambetta, when questioned by me, in presence of a number of English members of Parliament, on board the steamer which brought us to Greenwich to a club dinner, literally gave his opinion in this way: "If Gambetta had lived longer, and if he had obtained power as President of the Republic, he would certainly have made himself Emperor." It was an opinion I had held long before; Mr. Crawford, whom I had not personally known until then, fully confirmed it before these political notabilities. He had known Gambetta up to the time of his death, as a friend, and he had certainly no interest in giving him a different character from what he believed to be the truth.

Enough has been said to prove that, such as shifting public opinion is constituted in France, this revival of the Napoleonic cult cannot be looked upon with a light heart, when the deep alarm is taken into account which pervades French society in consequence of the ever-growing anarchistic madness—a madness which has spread even over the minds of such eminent scientific men as Elisée Réclus. In many ways, the situation of to-day reminds us of a similar one in 1848, with this difference only: that the incipient germs of the anarchistic doctrine which already then threatened the Democratic cause have developed since into full bloom. The utmost watchfulness is, therefore, recommendable to all sincere and sensible lovers of progress, lest the Republic should once more suffer harm for many years to come.

KARL BLIND.